

Proposed Question for Independent Inquiry:

in the wake of climate change and the environment in the present day, is it possible to stay optimistic and happy for the future?

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Environment, Happiness and Present-day

An Independent Research Document proposal.

In this endeavour I will narrate important and heavily mentioned sentiments within my practice, this is in relation to how society is today, how one can be affected, and finally how climate change is completely proceeding to alter the reality we are currently living in. The keywords being examined are; Environment, Happiness and the Present-day. Looking at the environment regarding climate change, happiness in regard to both society and the imminent slowness of climate change and finally the present society we live in, abundant with technology and innate selfishness. Humanity may end through complacency, avoidance and greed if nothing is done to prevent the oncoming onslaught. This exposition will highlight both a crisis and the society we currently live in, referring to a variety of artists and popular culture.

Environment

“We live in a strange world, where all the united science tells us that we are about eleven years away from setting off an irreversible chain reaction, way beyond human control, that will probably be the end of our civilisation as we know it” (Thunberg, 2020)

This quote by Greta Thunberg, a young activist, indicates that if we do not do something within this timeframe, our ecosystem will steadily begin to crumble and cease to exist. Civilisation has about 10 years before the world plunges down a slope of mass destruction (Thunberg, 2020). The environment encompassing us is something humanity has treated as worthless, civilisation has mass farmed, deforested and polluted without a consequent consideration. The environment surrounding us will hit a point whereby actions become irreversible and it's impossible to get anything back. It has taken a young girl to yell this to the planet to get attention to this long-awaited travesty (Aronoff, K., 2019).

A description of the environment could be the surroundings, objects, or conditions one is surrounded by (Fowler, Fowler and Thompson, 2000). But what transpires when all the objects and conditions that have aided our survival disappear? In the past, this planet was recognised to have an elegant and flourishing environment (Stephen, 2020). Through tiny actions and small decisions, most of humanity make every day, civilisation engages in crimes against the environment which lead to butchering the surrounding nature. It is destroyed through every plastic container bought, through shampoo bottles and shoes, non-recyclable clothes and even books (Siegle, 2019).

A potent example of this mentality is in the children's book by Dr Seuss, 'The Lorax'. To summarise, the story is profoundly centered around the life of nature, with characters that are heavily affected by the environment. The fiction is about two polar opposite characters, the Lorax who speaks for the trees and the once-ler who devours the trees for his own advantage (Dr Seuss., 2009). The Lorax naturally highlighted environmental issues and human indulgence, the story puts the environment around us into a completely new perspective.

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, Nothing is going to get better. It's not." (Dr Seuss., 2009)

This quote highlights everything that 'The Lorax' was composed for. It suggests that for anything to become sustainable, one needs to care for it first. The population has become used to mass production culture, to minute purchases and the illusion marketing gives. The Freudian Motivation Theory suggests that we purchase things through unconscious hidden desires (Freudian Motivation Theory Definition, 2020). Marketing takes advantage of this concept, as a result of this most natural nature has ceased to exist, replaced with factories and concrete buildings. No longer does humanity live in a balance with nature but robs it for everything it has to offer. To continue to support a world that we live in such as this,

the Lorax suggests that we stop the temporary happiness of mass-produced goods and we swap it for forests instead.

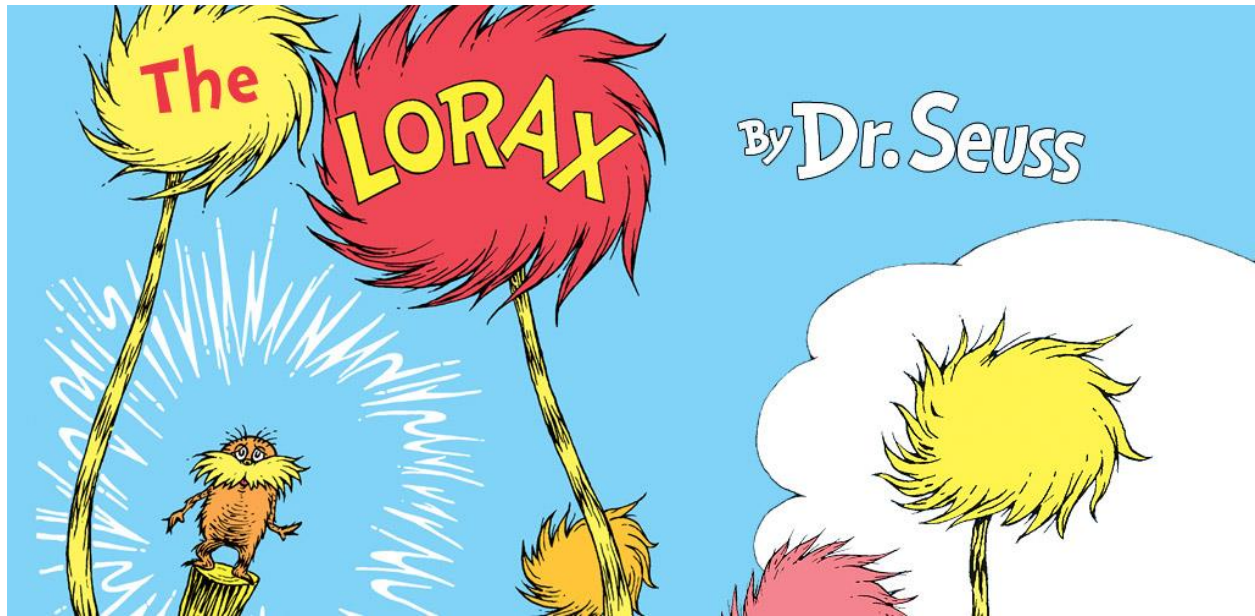


Figure 1 - Front cover of 'The Lorax' (Dr Seuss., 2009)

In current society, there is a lack of education on climate change in older generations (Calderon, 2020), leaving many to dismiss it as not 'real'. Purchasing low-priced food and plastic contributes to the economy and offers businesses more capital as plastic is inexpensive, so many do not care about environmental consequences (Finding Nature UK, 2020). The food that one may eat typically could lead to downfall, consuming fish and meat regularly will harm the planet. A way to tackle this issue effectively is to go vegetarian, for instance, *"a meat-eaters water footprint is around 5,000 litres per day, whereas vegetarians use about 1,000-2,000 litres per day, with vegans using even less"*(Fee, 2019) This statistic suggests that a 'meat-eaters' water footprint is larger as more water is required in order to be used for agriculture, to cut down on eating meat the water footprint is more than halved. Without fresh water, the environment can be harmed as water is essential to preserving soil, which grows the food on the planet (What Happens When We Do Not Conserve Water? 2020).

A devastating perspective of this notion is in the film 'okja' by Bong Joon Ho. The film touches on animal cruelty and food security under extreme population growth, much like on our planet currently, it also references the notion of mass production and selfish human nature (Wise, D.W., 2019). The plot tells the story of a young farm girl who befriends a creature named 'okja', a creature genetically modified to be mass-produced as food for humans. The company who oversees these creatures wants to take 'okja' back, the plot then moves toward a back and forth between a multinational company and a young girl who just wants her friend 'okja' back. This cruel perspective shines a light on how most happiness is something we gain superficially in modern-day, the revelation of sentient beings dying just so many can get luxuries.



Figure 2 - 'Okja' Movie Poster (Okja, 2017)

To protect our environment civilisation must grow more conscious in consideration to what we purchase and how we implement things. For instance; one can improve by travelling to markets and purchasing plastic-free food, by being vegetarian or eating organic, using online bank statements instead of physical paper and collecting rainwater to water plants (Fee, 2019). These are a variation of acts one could do in order to maintain our modern environment, to ensure that it is sustainable. As we exist in the environment, we are inevitably a part of the ecosystem, civilisation should attend to the atmosphere we breathe and the earth we walk on.

Happiness

Happiness is a sensation that is usually described as an emotional state of feeling joy (Fowler, Fowler and Thompson, 2000), it's been proven that this emotion is less abundant in the age of technology (Twenge, 2017). One may see being happy as someone who is smiling or laughing, such as in paintings like Judith Leyster's 'Jolly Topper' 1669 (Jolly Toper, 2020) or we could think of joyful paintings of the nature around us, much like in the TV show 'Joy of Painting' by Bob Ross whereby elements of nature would be referred to as '*happy trees*' (The Joy of Painting (TV Series 1983–1994) - IMDb, 2020). Jolly Topper being a representation of happiness in a physical sense, as in the painting the figure seems to be truly having an enjoyable experience. Whereas on the other hand in Bob Ross' 'Joy of painting' there is happiness in the mental sense as if a state of peace, it is the joy of painting.



Figure 3 - 'Jolly Topper' by Judith Leyster (Jolly Toper, 2020)

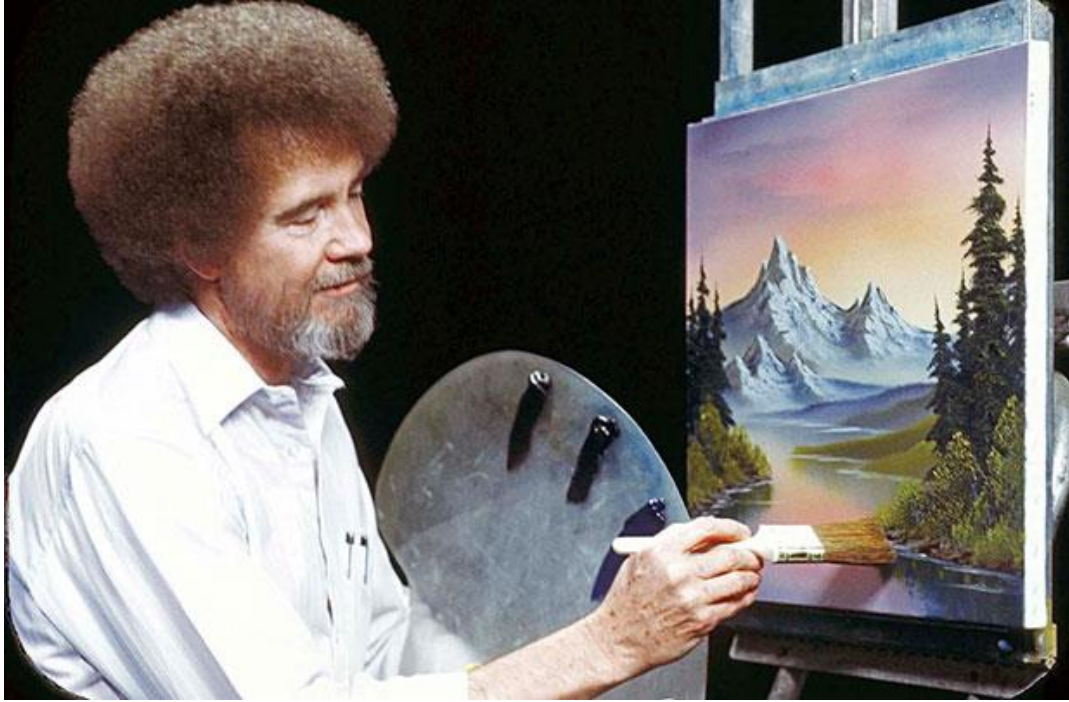


Figure 4 - Bob Ross from 'The Joy of Painting' (The Joy of Painting (TV Series 1983–1994) - IMDb, 2020)

"I can't think of anything more rewarding than being able to express yourself to others through painting. Exercising the imagination, experimenting with talents, being creative; these things, to me, are truly the windows to your soul." (Ross, 1993)

'The Joy of Painting' was a TV series focusing around painting nature, starring Bob Ross as the artist (The Joy of Painting (TV Series 1983–1994) - IMDb, 2020). This quote unquestionably suggests absolute contentment and happiness through painting. Proposing that creativity is a means to sincerely express and experience life. Paintings composed in the show solely centered around majestic notions of mother earth. If happiness truly comes from painting nature, exercising our imagination and expressing ourselves, this may explain a slow decline in happiness in individuals today. There is a slow decrease in nature around us, in a civilisation that does not easily allow individuals to follow the pathway to creativity. The government focuses on traditional subjects such as math and literature for students, steering potential

creative minds away from a creative occupation (Overview of the creative arts sector in the UK | Prospects.ac.uk, 2020). It has also been proven that artists are barely getting by financially in the UK, with the majority only earning about 10,000 pounds a year (Paying Artists | Valuing Art, Valuing Artists, 2020), which is significantly less than the minimum wage. With less focus on artistic jobs, many are forced into mundane salary work that can seem very unfulfilling for many. With this development, civilisation may feel a restraint on opportunity and imagination, which results in dwindling levels of happiness in the majority of people.

Generation Z is not so happy, those that will be born after will be even less happy, this is as there is now a heavy influence on social media and technology (Twenge, 2017). Many experience an information overload, whereby too much information is received and cannot be thought about clearly (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2020), this can result in a dysfunction of sorts as large waves of information cannot be thought about precisely (Jacoby, J. 1984). Yet in the age of mass media and news, it is hard to stay caring about the things we see every day online as civilisation is constantly exposed to it, many become indifferent. How can one stay happy with a lack of physical interaction and constant impending doom?

It has been proven that the relationship with nature improves our happiness, for instance, the larger the green space in an environment, the better mental health is. Nature also nurtures the human mind by helping recovery from stress and fatigue, encourages exercise and it also facilitates social contact (Cervinka, R., Röderer, K. and Hefler, E. (2012)). Nature also promotes pleasant moods yet also reduces crime and aggression (Zelenski, J. M. and Nisbet, E. K. (2014)). Happiness levels are also higher within a community (Layard, 2014), we as humans experience happiness around both people and nature. A good example of this would be in Season 4 Episode 2 of 'Rick and Morty' whereby the main character, Rick, creates a toilet on another planet whereby he can go to the restroom in peace, surrounded by nature ("Rick and Morty" The Old Man and the Seat (TV Episode 2019) - IMDb, 2020). This experience for him is bliss

as he is surrounded by breath-taking nature on an alternative planet, by visiting this space every time he goes to the toilet he experiences happiness.



Figure 5 - Season 4 Episode 2 of 'Rick and Morty' ("Rick and Morty" The Old Man and the Seat (TV Episode 2019) - IMDb, 2020)

Unlike the delightful prospect of nature Rick is experiencing, the environment is slowly disappearing around us. Climate change is a very real crisis and is gradually altering the things around us, now more homes are being developed, there are fewer fields and plants and more driveways. We are considerably less connected than ever with the introduction of social media, we message and stay inside rather than interact, we binge TV, we spend hours going down facebook only to accomplish nothing but bitterness towards others. Can we reverse the destruction in our minds and the planet around us? Instead of constructing the devastation of nature, civilisation can fix this by listening to scientists and tending to the planet around us.

The present-day

In the present day, we live in a world suffering from addiction, one that is uncaring towards our planet and home to a society that is completely obsessed with material objects. Civilisation is living in the now present day, addicted to technology, resulting in innate human complacency (Alter, A., 2017). The constant influx of information desensitises the human mind rendering many to be unconcerned and uncaring (Rosen, 2012).

An interesting perspective of this is within 'Tetsuo: The Iron Man' a 1989 cult classic movie about a Japanese salaryman who encounters a metal fetishist, whom purposely implants pieces of metal into his body (Tetsuo: The Ironman (1989), 2020). After this encounter the salaryman begins to germinate metal from his body, transforming into a cyborg-like monster, having many macabre dreams as well as strange metal-filled fantasies. As he emerges into a cyborg, he develops a connection with the metal fetishist, who has also been undergoing a similar transformation. The two then engage in a violent battle through the streets of Tokyo. This film brings an interesting perspective, acting almost like a metaphor for current society. At the rate technology is growing it will soon become the end of humanity, civilisation may become just heaps of metal with barely any humanity left. This is a very present-day issue many are suffering from 'nomophobia', the fear of living without mobile phones (Alter, A., 2017). This is proving that many may become warped like in 'Tetsuo: the Iron Man', humanity may already be cyborgs that cannot live without technology, even if it isn't implanted inside us.



Figure 6 - Screenshot from 'Tetsuo The Iron Man' (Tsukamoto, S., 2005)

Another perspective of present-day is the presence of mass production. At present we are a consumer society operating in 'free market', focused on supply and demand with lack of government control (Orlitzky, 2020). We are a civilization of material goods, many pride themselves on things that they own or things that one can buy (Goodwin, N.R., Ackerman, F. and Kiron, D. eds., 2013). This worldview may lead to the demise of many people and animals on the planet. Fast fashion is one of the many examples of mass production that affect climate change and the planet. An artist example of this would be 'Atomic' by Guerra De La Paz, who constructed a mushroom cloud out of clothes as a representation of what fast fashion is currently. It is the creation, use and disposal of which is unsustainable and profoundly lethal to the planet (Guerra de la Paz – Art Works for Change, 2020).



Figure 7 - 'Atomic' Art installation by Guerra De La Paz (Guerra de la Paz – Art Works for Change, 2020)

“We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the road in Robert Frost’s favourite poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been travelling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at the end lies disaster. The other fork in the road - the one ‘less travelled by’ - offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of our earth.” (Carson, 2000)

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson was based on a true story about how pesticides affect local communities. Pesticides known as DDT (What Is the Story About the Banned Pesticide DDT? 2020) were destroying plants, insects, most types of wildlife and animals, even effecting humans(Rachelcarson.org. 2020). It is a book that truly represents what is happening at present, yet it is also a calling for the future of the earth, it convinces oneself to care for nature around us and to respect it. Without aid, pesticides that 'help' our plants grow have the opposite effect, resulting in disruption. The quote above outlines the ignorance we have been living with as a human society. By supposedly 'letting things carry on as normal' is a prime example of mass avoidance, which is heavily abundant in the present day.

To summarise, the present-day is full of waves of uncertainty, climate change and an ocean full of human complacency. We live in a time of complete crisis, climate change, of mass production, social media and avoidance. The present-day is strange, full of happiness that exists only online and with objects. Society relies on items that are purchased in order to boost the economy, the present-day faces these very key issues with solutions that are ignored. Civilisation must ask, in the wake of climate change and the environment in the present day, is it possible to stay optimistic and happy for the future?

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Figure 6 - Screenshot from 'Tetsuo The Iron Man'

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